

FIRE—THE WANT OF THE TIMES

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**A SERMON
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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.**

*"I am come to send fire on the earth; and what will I, if it be already kindled."
Luke 12:49.*

OUR Lord was here certainly alluding to the opposition and persecution which the Gospel would excite. This is clear from the context, in which He declares that He is not come to send peace on the earth, but a sword, and from the parallel passages in the other Gospels, where our Lord is forewarning His disciples that they must look for persecution. Albeit that this was the first direction of the Savior's thought, He here delivers Himself of a truth of a far wider application, and reveals a great peculiarity of the Gospel which causes men to oppose it.

He bears witness that the Gospel is an ardent, fervent, flaming thing—a subject for enthusiasm, a theme for intense devotion, a matter which excites men's souls, and stirs them to the lowest depths—and for this reason mainly it awakens hostility. If the Gospel were a mere propriety of ceremonies, a truth which would slumber in the creed or lie entombed in the brain, if it were not a spiritual principle which lays hold upon the innermost nature, rules the emotions, and fires the affections, if it were not all this it would remain unopposed, but because it is so living and forcible a principle, the powers of evil are in arms to stop its course.

The subject then of this morning's meditation will be the fiery nature of the religion of Jesus Christ. And to bring this clearly before you we shall first and foremost CONSIDER THE HISTORY OF THE GOSPEL.

Practically, so far as the most of us are concerned, *it begins with a revelation contained in this book*—we come to this book, therefore to find out what the Gospel is. Bending over the pages we are struck with the extraordinary doctrines herein revealed. We find them far from being matters for the curious and the philosophical, but practical truths, touching upon everyday life, and bearing upon common human nature. Truths indeed so powerful over humanity that they seem to wear the key of man's heart hanging at their belt.

We find in this book the master truth of the love of God plainly and repeatedly stated. Right golden are these words, "God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believes in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." We see revealed to us a love of God so vast as to be incomprehensible, so generous as to be a theme for adoring wonder throughout eternity, since the Father gives up His equal Son, that He may bleed and die that we, who are rebellious and undeserving, may live through Him. As we believe the doctrine of divine love, we feel it to be a truth which sets the soul on fire with joy, gratitude, and love. As we peruse the Gospel, we perceive that divine love has been manifested in connection with a most astonishing display of justice and severity towards sin.

We see God willing to forgive, but not willing to allow His law to be dishonored, and therefore giving up His only-begotten Son to die a death of pain and ignominy, in order that the penalty of a broken law might be rendered to justice, and yet mercy displayed to rebels. We behold the Savior bleeding on the tree as much to manifest the justice as the love of God.

And now, as we behold our Lord's passion, thoughts that burn full into our bosom—holy detestation of sin lifts the torch of heart-searching, and the flame of true love burns up our lusts. He dies, the Friend of sinners dies. Murdered by human sin. Who will not henceforth loathe the murderous thing? It is

impossible to read aright in the illuminated volume of the cross, printed in crimson characters, without feeling our hearts burn within us with an unquenchable ardor.

As we study more fully the Gospel of our Lord Jesus, we perceive that in consequence of the death of the Crucified, and by reason of the love of God, eternal salvation by grace is freely proclaimed to everyone that believes in Christ. This creates at first a fire of opposition to the doctrine of free grace, given not for works of righteousness which we have done, but according to the decree of God, for naturally we choose to be saved by our own goodness, and we prefer, like Luther on Pilate's staircase, to please ourselves with acts of humiliating penance rather than submit to that voice which says, "By the works of the law there shall no flesh living be justified." Ere long, through God's Spirit, another fire burns in our soul of intense gratitude that God should condescend to make a covenant with man, and ordain faith in Jesus as the great way of obtaining reconciliation.

Brethren, these three truths—the love of God, of the atoning death of Christ, and of justification by faith, are doctrines which cannot sleep. They must be active. Like the sword of God, they cannot be quiet. They are a seed which must grow, a leaven which must spread, a fire which must burn on forever.

Take any other truth of the Gospel, and you will find it to be of the same energetic character—as for instance, that of the universal priesthood of all believers. Priestcraft, throughout all its domains, is stirred to bitterest hate by this truth. How cardinals and bishops gnash their teeth! How priests and friars revile this teaching, "You are a royal priesthood"! This does away with the pride of a clerical caste—the commerce in pardons and confessions.

Every man who believes in Jesus Christ is at once a priest, and as much a priest as any other of the saints, so that no man has any right to arrogate unto himself in particular the title of priest, or to suppose or imagine that there is any sacerdotal rank in the church but such as is common to all believers in Christ Jesus. This truth coming into a man's soul makes him blaze and burn with zeal. Am I consecrated to God, ordained to stand as a priest between the living and the dead, and to offer acceptable sacrifice through Jesus Christ? Then I will purge myself from uncleanness, and diligently serve my God.

"Am I and all my brethren priests?" says the believer. "Then down with priestcraft. We will be no longer duped by pretenders who claim to be channels of grace, and anointed dispensers of the divine favor." If the Gospel of Jesus Christ had been a mystic philosophy which only a few could comprehend, it would not have been a matter of fire. If it had been a mere pompous bunch of ceremonies which the people could only look upon and admire, it would have had no ardent influence. If it had been a mere orthodoxy to be learnt by heart, and to be accepted every jot and tittle without consideration, or if it had been a mere law of civilities and legalities, a mere ordinance of propriety, and rule, and regulation, it would never have been what Christ says it is.

But inasmuch as it is a principle which affects the heart, which takes possession of our entire manhood, changes, renews, uplifts, and inspires us, making us akin with God, and filling us with the divine fullness, it becomes in this world a thing of flame and fire, burning its way to victory. "I am come to send fire on the earth."

I have commenced the history of the Gospel with the book, but remember, the Gospel does not long remain a mere writing. It is no sooner thoroughly read and grasped than the reader becomes, according to his ability, a preacher. We will suppose when a *preacher* whom God has truly called to the work proclaims this Gospel, you will see for a second time that it is a thing of fire. Observe the man!

If God has sent him, he is little regardful of the graces of oratory. He counts it sheer folly that the servants of God should be the apes of Demosthenes and Cicero. He learns in another school how to deliver his Master's message. He comes forward in all sincerity, not in the wisdom of words, but with great plainness of speech, and tells to the sons of men the great message from the skies. The one thing of all others he abhors is to deliver that message with bated breath, with measured cadence, and sentences that chill and freeze as they fall from ice-bound lips. He speaks as one who knows that God has sent him, like a man who believes what he says, and moreover, feels that his message is a burden on his own

soul—a burden which he must be delivered from, a fire within his bones which rages till he gives it vent, for woe is unto him if he preach not the Gospel.

I would not utter too sweeping a sentence, but I will venture to say that no man who preaches the Gospel without zeal is sent of God to preach at all. When I turn to sermons such as Blair's, so faultless, and yet so lifeless, I wonder whether by any possibility a soul could have been converted under them. The absence of enthusiasm in a sermon is fatal. It is the lack of its essential element, the one thing needful to raise the discourse above the level of a mere essay.

In Whitefield's sermons, of which we have but the rough notes, one perceives coals of juniper and hot thunderbolts which mark him out to be a true Boanerges. Mark, my brethren, that the fire in the preacher sent of God is not that of mere excitement, nor that alone of an intelligent judgment acting upon the passions, but there is also a mysterious influence resting on God's servants which is irresistible. The Holy Ghost sent down from heaven anoints all true evangelists, and is the true power and fire. The more we believe in the presence and power of the Holy Ghost, the more likely shall we be to see the Gospel triumphant in our ministry.

Brethren, there is nothing in the Gospel, apart from the Spirit of God, which can win upon man, for man hates the Gospel with all his heart. Though the reasonableness of the Gospel of Jesus ought to make the belief of it universal, yet its plain dealing with human sin excites deadly antagonism, and therefore the Gospel itself would make no progress were it not for the divine power. There is an invisible arm which pushes forward the conquests of the truth. There is a fire unfed of human fuel, which burns a way for the truth of Jesus Christ into the hearts of men.

In tracing this history of the Gospel, I would have you observe *the effect of the preaching* of such a one as I have described. While he is delivering the truth of a crucified Savior, and bidding men repent of sin and believe in Christ, while he is pleading and exhorting with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven, do you see the fire flakes descend in showers from on high! One of them has dropped just yonder and fallen into a heart that had been cold and hard before—observe how it melts all that was hard and iron-like, and the tears begin to flow from channels long dried up. Can you hear the sobbing of that anxious one as she confesses her sins, and asks for God's mercy?

Do you notice the inward anguish of yonder youth who is convicted of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment to come, and who is ready to cry out, "What must I do to be saved?" Do you notice the opposite effect in another quarter? Yonder sinner has heard of Jesus, and now believes in Him. Mark well the joy he feels. He is not like a man who has learned fresh mathematical truth of a cold, unemotional nature, but he is ready to clap his hands. He has as much as he can do to restrain himself, he feels so overjoyed.

Do you observe that man who has now heard that Gospel for some few months? Do you notice that the fire still continues to burn within him? He gives to the cause of God what seems to others to be a lavish waste. He does for Christ what some would think to be a work of fanaticism. He is bold, he is in earnest, he is mighty in prayer—he is in fact, consecrated, given up, devoted—the zeal of God's house has eaten him up as it did the psalmist, so that his meat and his drink is to do the will of Him that sent him. Herein you see the true character of the Gospel, like fire it thaws the iceberg heart. It makes the iron flow forth to be molded into a divine shape. It sets the sacrifice on a blaze, and man's whole nature goes up in sacred smoke of gratitude and praise to the Most High.

And now, as surely as God glorifies His truth, and gives seals to the Christian ministry, *opposition is aroused*. If the preacher is supposed to live in the middle ages, his history will be told in a few words. He preaches at first to a crowd. Converts are made. The priests hear of it. He is abhorred. He resorts to lone places amongst the hills. He preaches in cottages and private assemblies—converts are still brought in. The hunt grows hotter. The hell hounds are out, eager for blood. The man is secreted. He takes his pen to write if he cannot use his tongue to speak. At last he is seized. He is dragged before the tribunals. He burns and blazes with sacred eloquence before his judges, but he is condemned to die. And now he stands upon a fiery pulpit, the firewood blazing all around him. And if he utters not a single word, yet

his death is eloquent. The fire of his earnestness is met by the fire of their malice—we know which of the two fires will win the day.

In these times we are screened by a gracious providence from the Satanic cruelty of persecution. Nowadays it takes another shape—the preacher is no sooner successful than it is reported that he is actuated either by covetous or ambitious designs. It is also currently reported that he said this or that ridiculous or blasphemous thing. There are some who heard him say what he never dreamed of, and others stand prepared to be godfathers to the lie, and add another of their own invention. And so abroad the slander flies, and opposition finds barbed shafts to fling at the too valiant champion.

Parties are made and sides taken for and against, and thus again is fulfilled the Master's saying, "I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law." You may depend upon it, there is no good doing if Satan does not howl. When there is no opposition from the infernal powers, it is because there is nothing to oppose.

"Let be," says Satan, "let be. A comfortable congregation, a sober minister, all asleep—let be! Drive on!" he says to his charioteer, "I need not alight here. Another small congregation—more pews than people—somnolent divine. Drive on!" says he, "No trouble here for my empire. Drive on to yonder meeting house, where there is an earnest preacher, and a people much given to prayer. Stop," says he, "I must use my best endeavors to stay this invasion of my kingdom." Straightway Satan comes to do his best or his worst to hinder the kingdom of Christ. In hell's opposition we discern a sign of hopefulness, for where that fire of malice burns against the Gospel, there God's fire of divine grace is burning also.

When the fire of conversion has kindled the fire of persecution, it proves its own infinite energy by subjecting even persecution to itself. That famous master in Israel, and servant of God, Farel, the Swiss divine, was converted to God by the sight of a martyr burnt in one of the streets of Paris. The wonderful demeanor of the saint as he stood in the midst of the fire to die, made an impression on his youthful spirit which was never afterwards shaken off.

It has often been through opposition that the church has made her greatest advances. Hence partly the reason for our Lord's saying, "What will I, if it be already kindled?" as if our Lord had meant, "What does My kingdom care if opposition do come?" Let it come. It is so fruitful a thing to the church of God, that the sooner it shall come, the better. We might almost say today, if there could be a return to the persecutions of the past, if it were not for the sin which would be caused thereby, what will we if the flames be already kindled?

The Christian man who is slandered and opposed can afford to smile with a sacred contempt at all that can be done against the Gospel of Christ. It was during the persecution which raged against the saints at Jerusalem that the church obtained one of the greatest pillars that have ever strengthened and adorned her fabric—I mean the apostle Paul. Breathing out threatenings against the people of God, he is on the road to Damascus, but the blaze of heavenly fire blinds him, strikes him to the ground, and afterwards he becomes a chosen vessel to carry, like an uplifted cresset, that very fire throughout the nations of the earth.

I look, brethren, for recruits to the truth from the ranks of our enemies. Never despair, the brightest preacher of Christ may yet be fashioned out of the wretched raw material of Roman Catholic and Anglican priests. In politics, one of the leaders of reform has come to us from the hostile party, and we may expect in religious matters to see the same, or even more wonderful enlightenments. A monk reformed Germany. A parish priest was the morning star of England's day of light. The Lord can send out His warrant to arrest a ringleader in the bands of the devil and to say to him, "You shall be no more against Me. You are Mine. Enlist beneath My banner and from this day be a champion for the truth which you have despised." Never let us fear. The fire of God which Christ has cast among us shall go on to burn, let man do what he will to quench it.

Thus I have given you a very brief abstract of the history of the Gospel from the book and the man, to the convert and the persecution, until opposition, valiantly met, yields up its spoils.

II. Secondly, LET US STUDY MORE CAREFULLY THE QUALITIES OF THE GOSPEL AS FIRE.

First, fire and the Gospel are notable for *ethereal purity*. The most refined form of idolatry that has ever existed has been the Parsee worship of fire. There is a kind of sentiment connected with the sun, the great parent of light and fire, which casts a halo around the error which it cannot excuse. Behold the enlightening flame, so immaterial, so ethereal, so akin to spirit, behold it and see to what the Gospel may be compared!

God Himself, though He has no earthly likeness, has been pleased to say of Himself, that He is “a consuming fire,” fire being as instructive a symbol of God as earth can afford. The Gospel is like fire because it is so pure a thing—there is no admixture of error or unholiness in it. Fire has little of earth. It has no dross. It is a simple element, I was about to say, but what it is no man knows. We scarce can put it among the component parts of this material earth, it is so pure, so ethereal.

Even so, the Gospel is very pure, like silver purified seven times, free from every earthly alloy. Moreover, it is exceedingly spiritual, so spiritual that few understand it. Ay, none but those to whom it is given of the Father. It is but the spiritual man, enlightened of the Spirit of God, who receives of the things which be of God.

It is so different from the trash of Rome. It talks not of the material flesh of Christ as if it could literally dwell in bread and wine. It talks not of aqueous regeneration wrought by drops of water. It never consecrates holy places, or imputes holiness to material substances. It declares that God is a Spirit and that they who worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth. The altar of Christianity is the person of an unseen Savior. The offering of Christianity is prayer and praise. The worship of Christianity is the uprising of the heart—it is not at all a matter for the eye, and hand, and nostril, but altogether spiritual, sublime, elevated, pure, God-like. Happy are they who have accepted a spiritual and perfect Gospel.

The Gospel is like fire, again, because of *its cheering and comforting influence*. He that has received it finds that the cold of this world no longer pinches him. He may be poor, but the Gospel’s fire takes away the chilliness of poverty. He may be sick, but the Gospel gives his soul to rejoice even in the body’s decay. He may be slandered and neglected, but the Gospel honors him in the sight of God. The Gospel, where it is fully received into the heart, becomes a divine source of matchless consolation.

Fire, in addition to its warmth, *gives light*. The flaming beacon guides the mariner or warns him of the rock. The Gospel becomes to us our guide through all the darkness of this mortal life, and if we cannot look into the future, nor know what shall happen to us tomorrow, yet by the light of the Gospel we can see our way in the present path of duty, ay, and see our end in future immortality and blessedness. Life and immortality are brought to light by the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Brethren and sisters, I need not enlarge here, because your lives are a daily homily upon this subject. You bear about with you this heavenly flame. It is this which cheers and guides you. You have day by day found that godliness with contentment is great gain. You have learned to rejoice in the Lord always, and to be happy in the favor of the Most High, in the salvation of Jesus, and in the consolation of the blessed Comforter. Thus do you show to others that Christ has sent fire upon the earth.

A third likeness between the Gospel and fire is its *testing qualities*. No test like fire. That piece of jewelry may seem to be gold. The color is an exact imitation. You could scarcely tell but what it was the genuine metal. Ay, but the melting pot will prove all—put it into the crucible and you will soon see. Thus in this world there are a thousand things that glitter, things which draw admirers that are advocated in the name of philanthropy and philosophy, and I know not what beside, but it is wonderful how different the schemes of politicians, and the devices of wise men appear when they are once put into the fining pot of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Despotic rulers and kings are very wise to try and keep the Gospel out of their dominions, for if they have anything crooked in the statute book, the Gospel is sure to show it. If there is anything rotten in the foundations of the government, there is nothing like a preached Gospel to discover and unveil it. What is

the reason today, that we enjoy such precious liberties in this realm? Liberties which I venture to say are not excelled by those possessed by any people under heaven—what has been the groundwork of our freedom, but this, that the Gospel preached among us, evermore like a fire, is testing and trying everything in our institutions, and that which is not right is sure in the end to give way. Much which now stands, but is not according to the Master's will, is marked to be consumed—and thank God it is so, for we shall be all the better for the overthrow of moss-grown injustice and wrong. The Gospel proves all things, and is the great ultimate test as to right and wrong.

Ah, how the fire of the Gospel will test a man's heart. Many a man thinks he carries something good within him, and he wraps himself up in the robes of his own righteousness until the Gospel comes, and then he finds that he is naked, and poor, and miserable. Many a professor imagines that he is serving God and doing well, till in the Gospel fire, his wood, hay, and stubble vanish in smoke. All through this world of ours, the Gospel will burn up with unquenchable fire everything that is evil, and leave nothing but that which is just and true.

Of all things under heaven, the most intolerant is the Gospel of Jesus Christ. "What," you ask, "intolerant?" Ay, say I, intolerant. The Gospel enables us to proclaim liberty of conscience to all men. The Gospel wields no temporal sword. It asks for no cannon balls to open the gates of a nation for its ministry. The true Gospel prepares no dungeon and no rack. It asks not Peter's sword to cut off Malchus' ear—but while it gives enfranchisement from all bondage, it demands obedience to itself. Within its own realm its power is absolute. Its arguments cut and kill error. Its teachings lay low every proud hope and expose every false way. The Gospel is merciful to the sinner, but merciless to sin. It will not endure evil, but wars against it to overturn it, and to set up a throne for Him whose right it is to reign.

The Gospel of Jesus Christ will never join hands with infidelity or Popery. It will never enter into league with idolatry. It cannot be at peace with error. False religions can lie down side by side with one another, for they are equally a lie, and there is a brotherhood between them, but the true religion will never rest until all superstitions are utterly exterminated, and until the banner of the King eternal, immortal, invisible, shall wave over every mosque and minaret, temple and shrine. Fire cannot be made tolerant of that which can be consumed—it will burn the stubble until the last particle is gone, and the truth of God is of the same kind.

A further parallel between the Gospel and fire lies in their *essential aggressiveness*. Take a few live coals, put them down in a wheat stack or corn rick, and tell the fire, "I have given you a bundle of straw to burn. Now burn—burn away to your heart's content, for that straw is yours. But you must go no further—burn with propriety and within bounds. Do not begin making sparks and flames, for we will have none of your fierce attacks."

While you are thus talking in this senseless way, the fire has blazed up vehemently, burning the materials surrounding it, and if you do not take to your heels you will probably be yourself consumed. For fire is not to be talked to in that way. It knows nothing about moderation and keeping to itself. Have I not often heard this kind of theory laid down, "You religionists have your own liberty. Do keep yourselves respectable and quiet, and enjoy yourselves, but leave other people alone. You have no business to be propagandists, compassing sea and land to make proselytes. Why fall into fanaticism? Sit still now. You have cushioned seats—be comfortable upon them. The minister has his stipend and his pulpit—let him mind his own congregation. It will be as much as he can do if he pleases his own disciples. Why need a man become a firebrand, bigotedly intruding his peculiar views where they are not wanted?"

Yes, that is just what the world desired in Christ's day, no doubt. Idolaters would have been satisfied if Christianity had kept itself to the handful of disciples which Christ had gathered. Christians might have been ridiculed at first, but by degrees they would have cooled down into a respectable sect like the Pharisees and Sadducees, especially after those uneducated fishermen had died out, and some

respectable tradesmen in Jerusalem, and perhaps, a squire or two from beyond Jordan had joined the community.

But Christianity did not happen to be a thing that would so soon be frozen. The Gospel of Jesus was a thing of fire. Jerusalem would not serve its turn. All Judea and Galilee could not afford scope for it.

*“More and more the kingdom grows,
Ever mighty to prevail.”*

Asia Minor is set upon a blaze by that fanatical firebrand, Saul of Tarsus, and even that is not enough. The fire burns so fiercely in Asia that the sparks fly across the Bosphorus. Paul is working in Macedonia. He is heard of in Athens, he is talked about in Corinth, nor even yet is it enough—that restless soul must cross the sea and is found in Rome thundering at the gates of Caesar’s palace. Right away in Spain the new religion is gaining ground. Proconsuls, what are you at? The gods of Rome defied in far-off Spain?

Nay, the emissaries have crossed beyond Gaul into the savage land of Britain. They have dared to stand in Albion and proclaim the name of Him who was crucified! Will they never rest? Let us torture them, rack them, shut them up in prison. But see, they come to the tribunals eagerly, and confess themselves Christians with enthusiasm. Pliny writes home to know what is to be done with these people who seem so anxious to die. Well, bring them into the amphitheatre, fling them to the wild beasts, let the bears and lions see what they can do with them. Make them die a gladiator’s death amidst the shouts of Rome’s matrons and senators. It does not stay them.

Sir, they have entered the senate. They have disciples among the patricians. The name of Christ was spoken the other day right in the midst of the senate to the Emperor’s own face! Ay, they even say that there are some high in rank and of imperial blood who worship the Crucified! Yes, and as years roll on, you priests of Jupiter and Saturn, listen to the tale and be astonished—your gods are rolled away from their pedestals. You who are called Pontiff and Pontifex Maximus, all you are sent away—your temples are turned into churches, and your places where idolatry reigned supreme become the assembling houses of the saints of the living God.

Will its hand never stay? Will it not pause today? No, sirs, it never will, nor can. The true religion of Jesus Christ is essentially warlike. As the heathens spoke of Minerva leaping armed from the head of Jove, so did the religion of Christ spring armed from the very heart of Jesus Christ, and it stands in the midst of the world an enemy of all unrighteousness, the foe of all oppression, the friend of the poor and needy, and the enemy of everything that is at enmity to God. You are no Christian if such is not your Christianity, for Jesus Christ brought not a slumbering faith, but fire into the earth.

Our religion is like fire, again, because of *its tremendous energy and its rapid advance*. Who shall be able to estimate the force of fire? Our forefathers standing on this side the river, as they gazed many years ago upon the old city of London wrapped in flame, must have wondered with great astonishment as they saw cottage and palace, church and hall, monument and cathedral all succumbing to the tongue of flame. It must be an amazing sight, if one could safely see it, to behold a prairie rolling along in great sheets of flame, or to gaze upon Vesuvius when it is spouting away at its utmost force. When you deal with fire, you cannot calculate—you are among the imponderables and the immeasurables. I wish we thought of that when we are speaking of religion. You cannot calculate concerning its spread.

“How many years would it take to convert the world?” asks somebody. Sir, it need not take ten minutes, if God so willed it, because as fire, beyond all reckoning, will sometimes when circumstances are congenial, suddenly break out and spread—so will truth. Truth is not a mechanism, and does not depend upon engineering. A thought in one mind, why not the same thought in fifty? That thought in fifty minds, why not in fifty thousand? The truth which affects a village, and stirs it from end to end—why not a town, a city—why not a nation? Why not all nations? God may, when He wills it, bring all human minds into such a condition that one single text such as this, “This is a faithful saying, and

worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners,” may set all hearts on a blaze.

Vainly do we reckon the missionary costs so much, and only so many can therefore be sent. Ay, but God works most by weakest means full often, and sometimes achieves by His poorest saints works which He will not perform by those who have every visible appliance. Perhaps no men have ever been more useful than the Moravians, yet what poor men the Moravians have always been! How inadequate their means, yet they make it their lives’ duty to propagate the truth as it is in Jesus in every land and God is with them. The Lord has but to stir up the church in England to a proper sense of her duty, and endow her with confidence in Christ, and a conviction that God is about to bless her, and you and I, ere these hairs shall be grey, may see such sights as we would not have believed though a man should tell them unto us.

I can believe anything about fire. Let a man tell me that in a house just now a bundle of rags have begun to burn. Let him tell me in five minutes that the shop is on fire. Let him tell me in five minutes more that it is blazing through the shutters, or that the next story is burning, or that the roof is coming in, I could believe it all. Fire can do anything. And so with the Gospel of Jesus, given but an earnest preacher, given but the truth fully declared, given an earnest people determined to propagate the Gospel, and I can understand a nation converted to God, ay, and all the nations of the earth suddenly shaken with the majesty of the truth.

Once more, the Gospel resembles fire in this, that it *will ultimately prevail*. It is clearly revealed in Scripture, that as the world was once destroyed by water, it will a second time be destroyed by fire. Perhaps they are correct who tell us that the center of the earth is all a molten mass, and we dwell but upon the cool crust of it. Perhaps it may be so, that these great volcanoes are the ventilators of subterranean fires, but surely it is predestined that earth and all the works that are therein shall be burnt up, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat. Fire will win the day. Old ocean, you may roll on in your pride, and laugh at fire, but fire will lick you up with its tongues of flame. Men, you may erect your machinery with which to protect your cities, but there shall not be a wreck of all your cities left. Like old Babel’s tower, of which only a heap of dust and ruins remains, your pompous cities shall utterly vanish away.

So with the Gospel, the seas of iniquity stay for a while the fire of the Gospel from spreading, but that sea shall be utterly removed by the energy of divine truth. The day shall come when the fire of the Gospel shall make the whole world to be a burnt-offering unto the Lord Most High. Let us have courage! Let us look forward to the flight of time, and expect the advent of our Master—for the day shall come when He shall reign from the river even to the ends of the earth, and from sea and land, from mountain and valley, there shall come up the universal song, “Hallelujah! Hallelujah! the Lord God omnipotent reigns.”

III. Lastly, if the Gospel be thus like fire, LET US CATCH THE FLAME.

If this fire shall really burn within us, we shall become from this very moment *fearless of all opposition*. That retired friend will lose the strings which bind his tongue—he will feel that he must speak as God shall bid him. Or if he cannot speak, he will act with all his might in some other way to spread abroad the savor of Immanuel’s name. That coward who hid his head and would not own his profession, when the fire burns, will feel that he had rather court opposition than avoid it. There may be some young man here who is about to take up his cross—it has come to this point, he must decide which it shall be. Let him do so without fear, for the Master whom he serves will bear him through all opposition.

The fondest relationship which can be rent by our decision for Christ shall be more than made up for us by the union which it cements with Jesus Himself. Better that we lost every friend, and all our kinsfolk, and had the bad word of all the neighborhood, than that we lost the love of God which passes knowledge. Cast in your lot, dear friends, with Christ, and fling down the gauntlet to the world. Let them say their worst. Let them howl, let them bark, ay, let them bite—little shall it matter to the man to whom

persecution has become an occasion for rejoicing, because now is he made like unto the prophets which were before him.

If we catch this flame, we shall, after having defied all opposition, *weary utterly of the mere proprieties of religion* which at this present time crush down like a nightmare the mass of the religious world. Do you believe that if Jesus Christ came into this world, He would call nine-tenths of our modern religion the Christianity which He preached? Is it the least bit like His own zeal? Many think it to be all the faith that Christianity requires to put on your best things on Sunday, and go to your place of worship with your Bible or hymn-book, or prayer-book, and sit there decorously, and look at other people's bonnets and dresses, and then you come home again!

Others think it is sufficient to listen to the sermon discreetly, perhaps making a few observations upon the discourse, perhaps making none, because there is not enough in the sermon to be a peg to hang a remark upon! The religion of many professors is nothing more than that, it is hardly that. Do you not know of people who believe the articles, and do not doubt them, because they never think of them! They have packed them away in the iron safe, with their title deeds, which they feel so sure about that they do not care to read them. They are orthodox, but they feel no power in their own souls produced by these truths, no depression because the truth convinces them of sin, no exhilaration because the truth shows them their safety in Christ.

Many, if they get to a supposed saving faith, get no farther. They are saved themselves, and that seems to be all they care about. Their neighbors in the next pew may be damned, but what care they? All down the street in which they live there may be scarcely a person attending a place of worship, but what business is that of theirs? They belong to the denomination of Cain, and they say, "Am I my brother's keeper?" Such men have denied the faith. The selfishness which reigns supreme in them is as antichristian as even covetousness, or adultery, or murder could be, for the spirit of Christianity is unselfishness, and love to others, care of other's souls, a devotedness to the increase of the Master's kingdom.

O brethren, it is sickening work to think of your cushioned seats, your chants, your anthems, your choirs, your organs, your gowns, and your bands, and I know not what besides, all made to be instruments of religious luxury, if not of pious dissipation, while you need far more to be stirred up and incited to holy ardor for the propagation of the truth as it is in Jesus. One would think Christ came into the world to administer laudanum to the sons of men, or prepare down for all sleepers. But instead of it He came to send fire on the earth—and where His true Gospel is, it is a fire that will not rest and be quiet amidst mere proprieties and rounds of performances.

If we catch this fire, we shall not only become dissatisfied with mere proprieties, but we shall all of us become *instant in prayer*. Day and night our soul will go up with cries and moanings to God, "O God, how long, how long, how long? Will You not avenge Your own elect? Will not Your Gospel prevail? Why are Your chariots so long in coming? Why does not Christ reign? Why is not the truth triumphant? Why do You allow idolatry to rule and priestcraft to reign? Make haste, O God, grasp Your two-edged sword, and smite, and let error die, and let truth win the victory!" It is thus we shall be always pleading if this fire burns in our spirits.

This will lead us to *eager service*. Having this fire in us, we shall be trying to do all we can for Christ. We shall never think we have done enough. We shall start uneasy if for a moment we rest. We shall seek if possible to snatch souls from the burning, to preach Christ where He is not known, and to bring Him fresh jewels for His crown. Brethren, this is a large church, numbering now nearly four thousand souls, and if you grow cold and lose your earnestness, I would sooner have forty warm-hearted men and women than the whole multitude of you if you are chilled. For what are you who are cold and indifferent but a clog upon the chariot. What are you but like the mixed multitude that came out of Egypt? Sin begins among you, but no strength do you minister to the Lord's host.

The warm-hearted, earnest, thorough Christian is the life of the church. And if we cannot all be as we would, may the fiery spirits among us never be retarded by those who are more lethargic. May they

live above the influences that would drag them down! May we never be content to do as much as others, to pray as much as others, to give as much as others, but may it be our resolve that we will outstrip all, not out of any emulation, but out of a love to Him who has done so much, forgiven so much, secured so much, promised so much to us who are His people!

O lovers of Christ, come and bow at His feet, and ask Him to let His love supply you with fire this morning! Come to the pierced One, gaze upon the thorn-crown, look into the hole which the soldier's spear has made, gaze into the nail prints, and say unto your soul,

*“Now, for the love I bear His name,
What was my gain I count my loss.
My former pride I call my shame,
And nail my glory to His cross.*

*Yes, and I must and will esteem
All things but loss for Jesus' sake.
O may my soul be found in Him,
And of His righteousness partake.”*

God bless you for Christ Jesus' sake. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—LUKE 12:13-53.

Taken from The C. H. Spurgeon Collection, Version 1.0, Ages Software. Only necessary changes have been made, such as correcting spelling errors, some punctuation usage, capitalization of deity pronouns, and minimal updating of a few archaic words. The content is unabridged. Additional Bible-based resources are available at www.spurgeongems.org.